

Ideas for Meeting the Learning Needs of 21st Century Learners

21st Century Learners have specific needs that are difficult to meet in a traditional classroom situation. This generation is what we call the "Generation Y" high school and college students. You may be a Gen Yer or "Millennial." If many of your students are the Generation Y, here are some ideas that might help you when you design your learning activities:

1. Present the big picture. Many Generation Yers are global or "big picture" learners who learn better if they have the big picture and then learn more concrete and specific information.
2. Use technology. This is a generation that uses technology for "everything." A traditional classroom that does not integrate technology will not meet students' needs for variety, stimulation, and access to information. Some classrooms still require students to study and learn in ways that, to them, are completely different from the ways they operate in every other aspect of their daily lives.
3. Make it fun. Like their Generation X predecessors, Generation Y's want to enjoy their learning. If it is not fun, they will consider it "boring" and then will become less effective. Gen Yers learn best when they are entertained.
4. Incorporate games. Computer games if used wisely can be very effective. These involve many of the strategies that Generation Y's have already developed for learning: multimedia sensory stimulation, interactive (either with other people or with the computer), or individualization (customization) of the learning experience, control over time, and highly visual.
5. Develop opportunities for experiential learning. Small group discussions, projects, in-class presentations and debates, peer critiques, team projects, service learning, field experiences, developing simulations and case method approaches.
6. Encourage the development of learning communities - small groups of students that can discuss and analyze readings and assignments. This also addresses the need of many Generation Y students for hands-on activities in the classroom.
7. Provide lots of structure. Generation Y students look for structure in their learning setting. They want to know precisely what is required of them, when work is due, and very specific information about expectations.
8. Be organized. Because they need a lot of structure, Generation Y students also learn best when materials are presented in a well-organized and rational way. Generation Y students are much more prolific readers than Generation Xers, so reading materials for them are not a stumbling block. However, materials should be clear, use lots of white space, and be visually accessible, just as for Generation X. Summarizing key points is very important for this group. They want to know where they are going with their learning - and why.
9. Provide lots of feedback. Providing frequent feedback is essential for Generations Y's. This allows them to know when they are headed in the right direction and when they are getting off-track. Frequent attention from teachers is welcome.
10. Be relevant. Generation Yers will demand relevance in what they are learning. This will also want to "skip" steps in learning if there are areas of the information that have already mastered, and will avoid repetition and rote practice once they feel they have mastered the information.
11. Use their talents and strengths. This is a generation that likes to be useful and helpful. If you have students who know more about a topic than you do, let them talk about what they know. If they finish an assignment early, let them help other students.

12. Allow for creativity and be creative. This is a generation that thinks in many dimensions at once. Their brains work more hyperlinked where there needs to be opportunities for them to be creative in how they approach and fulfill requirements. Music, art, and games are good teaching tools.
13. Offer multiple options for performance. Try to provide a variety of acceptable, measurable outcomes and assessment strategies so that students can demonstrate what they understand their way.
14. Be visual. This group is the most visual of all learning age groups.
15. Be smart. Generation Yers will not be upset with you if they feel they know more than you do about a specific topic. They will expect you to accept their ideas and be a competent teacher. To this generation, being "a good teacher" is more important than knowing everything.
16. Be fair. Like their Boomer parents, fairness is important to this group.
17. Recognize the need for social interaction. Develop learning strategies that incorporate social interaction.
18. Encourage discussions. Develop activities that encourage students to exchange information verbally. When they say it, it is converted more quickly to long-term memory.
19. Demand respect and positive reinforcement. Positive reinforcement, from teachers and peers improved learning and increases motivation.
20. Think positively. Positive thinking stimulates the brain. It increases the likelihood of success.
21. Schedule shorter activities. The Generations Y attention span declines after 15-20 minutes. You have your student's brain for only 20 minutes at a time. Break up the class time into 20-30 minute segments with some kind of activity (outbursts, e.g.).
22. Make learning relevant. Tie learning tasks to real-world problems. If it is not seen as relevant, there will be resistance to learning.

Teaching Gen Yers <http://www.techlearning.com/PrintableArticle>.